
DENTAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

DENTAL AMALGAM

For more than 100 years, literally billions of dental amalgam fillings have been used to restore decayed teeth. Dental amalgam has been proven superior in terms of durability and cost-effectiveness. Yet, misconceptions about amalgam still exist.

MERCURY IS USED IN DENTAL AMALGAMS.

TRUE! All dental amalgams, commonly referred to as "silver fillings," contain various metals such as silver, copper and tin, as well as mercury. Mercury is necessary to chemically bind these compounds together to form a hard, stable restorative material. When mercury is combined with these metals, however, it becomes an inactive substance. Under the pressures of vigorous chewing and grinding, very small amounts of mercury vapor may be released. There is no valid, scientific evidence that associated this minute amount of mercury vapor with any health problems.

DENTAL AMALGAMS ARE SAFE.

TRUE! Studies of dental amalgam in tooth restorations have been conducted worldwide for more than 100 years. These studies have repeatedly failed to find any link between amalgam restorations and any medical disorder. Amalgam continues to be a safe restorative material for dental patients.

AMALGAM IS THE MOST-PREFERRED DENTAL RESTORATION.

TRUE! Dental amalgam is used for a number of reasons including its durability, longevity and ability to withstand the intense pressures of chewing. Other materials have drawbacks. Gold is an effective material, but it costs more than amalgam. Tooth-colored ceramics, porcelains and plastics provide a natural appearance, but aren't as resistant to stress or fracture and have to be replaced more often. New restorative materials continue to be developed that may someday equal or exceed the benefits of amalgam. In determining the best material, dentists use their professional judgement and consider the desires of the patient.

MERCURY IS A NATURALLY OCCURRING ELEMENT IN THE ENVIRONMENT.

TRUE! Mercury can be found in food, water and air. Consequently, there is always a very low level of mercury present in the human body. It is interesting to note that the daily dosage of mercury from these non-dental sources exceeds the minuscule amount released from dental amalgam fillings.

PEOPLE ARE CURED FROM ILLNESS WHEN AMALGAM FILLINGS ARE REMOVED.

FALSE! Stories of overnight cures from serious diseases are not supported by sound scientific evaluation. When these claims are made, it is important to remember that many diseases, such as multiple sclerosis, have a history of suddenly subsiding. The patient's condition may improve or the symptoms may even disappear for a while for no known reason. The Food and Drug Administration has concluded that amalgam causes no demonstrated clinical harm to patients and that removing amalgam will not prevent adverse health effects. Also, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society has found no evidence that multiple sclerosis is related to amalgam fillings.

PATIENTS CONCERNED ABOUT AMALGAM FILLINGS SHOULD HAVE THEM REPLACED WITH OTHER MATERIALS.

FALSE! Unless there is an allergic reaction, it is not advisable to have amalgam fillings replaced. Healthy teeth can be structurally damaged by removing fillings, which can lead to further dental problems.

ALLERGIC REACTIONS TO MERCURY ARE VERY RARE.

TRUE! Only a very small number of people are allergic to the mercury in amalgam fillings. Fewer than 100 cases have ever been reported. In these rare instances, mercury may trigger an allergic response. Symptoms, which are similar to typical skin allergies, usually disappear in two to three weeks. Often patients who are truly allergic to amalgam have a medical or family history of allergies to metals. If there is an allergy, another restorative material can be used.